

Message Text

SECRET

PAGE 01 GUATEM 04309 091917Z
ACTION SS-25

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 SSO-00 CCO-00 /026 W
-----127248 091919Z /40
O P 091849Z JUL 77 ZFF4
FM AMEMBASSY GUATEMALA
TO SECSTATE WASHDC NIACT IMMEDIATE 6693
INFO AMEMBASSY LONDON IMMEDIATE
AMEMBASSY MEXICO PRIORITY
AMCONSUL BELIZE IMMEDIATE
AMEMBASSY CARACAS PRIORITY
USUN NEW YORK PRIORITY

S E C R E T GUATEMALA 4309

EXDIS

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PBOR, MPOL, GT, BH, UK
SUBJECT: BELIZE DISPUTE

REF: (A) STATE 159812 (B) STATE 159614

1. I SAW PRESIDENT LAUGERUD AT 10 A.M. SATURDAY, JULY 9 AND TOLD HIM THAT I WAS BRINGING HIM TWO MESSAGES THAT HAD ARRIVED DURING THE NIGHT. I FIRST CONVEYED TO HIM THE SUBSTANCE OF REF A, EXPLAINING THAT IT WAS IN RESPONSE TO THE EMBASSY'S REPORT OF MY CONVERSATION WITH THE PRESIDENT ON THURSDAY.
2. PRESIDENT'S ONLY COMMENT ON THE FIRST MESSAGE WAS TO REITERATE THAT THE ONLY GUATEMALAN TROOPS IN THE PETEN ARE ONE REINFORCED INFANTRY BATTALION, WHICH HE SAID WAS THE NORMAL GARRISON FOR THAT AREA AND COULD NOT BE REDUCED. "WHAT I HAVE NOT MOVED, I CAN- NOT BRING BACK," THE PRESIDENT SAID IN MAKING THE POINT THAT THERE WAS LITTLE FURTHER GUATEMALA COULD DO TO REDUCE TENSION OR POSSIBILITY OF INCIDENT.

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3. I THEN GAVE PRESIDENT INFORMATION CONTAINED IN REF B. HE RECEIVED THE NEWS WITH GREAT SATISFACTION, COMMENTING THAT BRITISH MOVEMENT OF A TACTICAL HEADQUARTERS WAS "NORMAL" AND THAT THE TROOP FIGURE OF 350 TO 400 WAS CONSISTENT WITH THE BRITISH STATEMENT THAT ONLY A HEADQUARTERS UNIT AND AN ADDITIONAL COMPANY HAD BEEN MOVED IN. HE SAID THIS WOULD INDEED HELP HIM A GREAT

DEAL. CONTINUING TO VOLUNTEER INDICATIONS THAT GUATEMALA WAS DOING EVERYTHING IT COULD, HE SAID THAT AS HE HAD TOLD ME HE WOULD, THEY HAD STARTED UNLOADING BOMBS AND ROCKETS FROM THE A-37 JETS YESTERDAY. ONLY TWO WILL BE KEPT ARMED, IN ACCORDANCE WITH STANDARD PRACTICE SINCE A GUATEMALAN HELICOPTER WAS SHOT DOWN BY GUERRILLAS IN EL QUICHE LAST NOVEMBER. SINCE THEN TWO A-37S ARE ALWAYS KEPT ON THE ALERT IN CASE ARMY TROOPS IN THE GUERRILLA AREA NEED SUPPORT.

4. I ASKED IF A DATE HAD BEEN SET FOR MINISTER ROWLAND'S VISIT. THE PRESIDENT SAID NOT AS FAR AS HE KNEW. FOREIGN MINISTER MOLINA WOULD BE RETURNING TO GUATEMALA TODAY AND GIVING HIM A FULL REPORT. BUT MOLINA HAD TOLD HIM ON THE TELEPHONE THAT ROWLANDS WOULD BE HERE "WITHIN THE NEXT TEN DAYS". THE PRESIDENT SAID "SOME PEOPLE" HAVE PROPOSED THAT A VERY LARGE PUBLIC DEMONSTRATION BE PREPARED FOR ROWLANDS ARRIVAL. ALTHOUGH INTENTION WAS DEMONSTRATION BE ENTIRELY PEACEFUL, PRESIDENT WAS WELL AWARE THAT SUCH MASS DEMONSTRATIONS CAN START PEACEFULLY AND END OTHERWISE. THAT WOULD SIMPLY CREATE A MESSY SITUATION FOR BOTH COUNTRIES. HE WOULD THEREFORE TRY TO HANDLE THE MATTER SO AS TO DISCOURAGE ANY DEMONSTRATION. I SAID I THOUGHT THE PRESIDENT WAS EXACTLY RIGHT.

5. COMMENT: WHILE PRESIDENT DID NOT EXPRESSLY SAY SO, THERE WAS NOTHING IN OUR CONVERSATION TO SUGGEST THAT HE INTENDS TO PROCEED WITH TROOP MOVEMENTS AND WE ARE REASONABLY CONFIDENT HE WILL NOT DO SO, IN THE ABSENCE OF SOME NEW DEVELOPMENT. HE
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WAS OBVIOUSLY PLEASED TO RECEIVE THE INFORMATION ON THE ACTUAL SIZE OF BRITISH REINFORCEMENTS AND TO HAVE RECEIVED IT SO PROMPTLY.
BOSTER

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NNN

Message Attributes

Automatic Decaptioning: Z
Capture Date: 01-Jan-1994 12:00:00 am
Channel Indicators: n/a
Current Classification: UNCLASSIFIED
Concepts: DISPUTES, TROOP DEPLOYMENT, FORCE & TROOP LEVELS
Control Number: n/a
Copy: SINGLE
Sent Date: 09-Jul-1977 12:00:00 am
Decaption Date: 22 May 2009
Decaption Note: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Action: RELEASED
Disposition Approved on Date:
Disposition Case Number: n/a
Disposition Comment: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Date: 22 May 2009
Disposition Event:
Disposition History: n/a
Disposition Reason:
Disposition Remarks:
Document Number: 1977GUATEM04309
Document Source: CORE
Document Unique ID: 00
Drafter: n/a
Enclosure: n/a
Executive Order: GS
Errors: N/A
Expiration:
Film Number: D770244-1200
Format: TEL
From: GUATEMALA
Handling Restrictions:
Image Path:
ISecure: 1
Legacy Key: link1977/newtext/t19770775/aaaacmxg.tel
Line Count: 97
Litigation Code IDs:
Litigation Codes:
Litigation History:
Locator: TEXT ON-LINE, ON MICROFILM
Message ID: 4e938a6e-c288-dd11-92da-001cc4696bcc
Office: ACTION SS
Original Classification: SECRET
Original Handling Restrictions: EXDIS
Original Previous Classification: n/a
Original Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Page Count: 2
Previous Channel Indicators: n/a
Previous Classification: SECRET
Previous Handling Restrictions: EXDIS
Reference: 77 STATE 159812, 77 STATE 159614
Retention: 0
Review Action: RELEASED, APPROVED
Review Content Flags:
Review Date: 16-Feb-2005 12:00:00 am
Review Event:
Review Exemptions: n/a
Review Media Identifier:
Review Release Date: n/a
Review Release Event: n/a
Review Transfer Date:
Review Withdrawn Fields: n/a
SAS ID: 1913998
Secure: OPEN
Status: NATIVE
Subject: BELIZE DISPUTE
TAGS: PBOR, MPOL, GT, BH, UK
To: STATE
Type: TE
vdkgvwkey: odb://SAS/SAS.dbo.SAS_Docs/4e938a6e-c288-dd11-92da-001cc4696bcc
Review Markings:
Margaret P. Grafeld
Declassified/Released
US Department of State
EO Systematic Review
22 May 2009
Markings: Margaret P. Grafeld Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 22 May 2009